

UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL

10 February 1987

HEADLINE: CIA used threats to seek ouster of Contra leader

BYLINE: By DANA WALKER

DATELINE: WASHINGTON

CIA agents threatened to manipulate air drops of guns and humanitarian aid to Nicaraguan rebels in an effort to force the ouster of a Contra leader unpopular with the Reagan administration, sources say.

At a time when Congress had outlawed U.S. military aid to the Contras, CIA agents warned rebels in southern Nicaragua last spring that they could stop or delay necessary air drops, the sources said Monday.

P The CIA officials also promised more drops if the rebels would oust Eden Pastora, the leader known as Commander Zero, who was not popular with the administration, the sources said.

One knowledgeable source said the result was that CIA officials led Contras under Pastora to believe the agency controlled both military and humanitarian aid flowing to them last spring -- a time when Congress had prohibited the government from supplying or directing supplies of military aid to the rebels.

"Commanders were told by the agency or agency assets that these drops were from them and they would have more if they left Pastora," said the source, who like the others spoke on condition of anonymity.

The CIA has denied violating the law in support of the U.S.-backed Contras.

A spokesman for Pastora, speaking on the record, did not address specifics but said CIA agents and other administration officials promised commanders under Pastora "the earth and the sky" if they would leave his group,

"I was informed by our people in Central America that the United Nicaraguan Opposition (a Contra group) as well as the southern block were being guided by agents and individuals from this administration," said spokesman Leonel Teller. "Some of them were members of the agency (CIA). Some of them were members of other sectors of the U.S. administration."

A The Washington Post reported Monday that Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., notified acting CIA Director ~~Robert Gates~~ that the senator's staff knew about the threat of withholding supplies.

Gates, appointed by President Reagan to replace the ailing William Casey as director of the agency, faces confirmation hearings beginning Feb. 17.

The Post said the CIA inspector general's office is re-examining whether the agency violated the congressional bans. The agency's possible role in aiding the Contras is also under intense scrutiny in House and Senate investigations into the Iran arms-Contra aid scandal.

Pastora now is running a fishing business in Costa Rica, employing wounded Contras.